THE
Christians Best Exercise:
BEING AN
Earnest Invitation
TO THE
FREQUENTING
OF THE
Common Prayer.

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A DISCOURSE

Concerning the DAILY FREQUENTING THE Common Prayer.

THere are two principal ends of the Worſhip of God, *The Glory of him that is Worſhipped, and the Benefit of the Worſhippers.* And theſe two are ſo inſeparably united, that St. *Auguſtine* [a] reduceth both to one, aſſuring us that all the advantage accrues to us. But whether we look on them ſingle or conjoined, no part of *Divine Worſhip* doth ſo much expreſs and advance God's glory, nor ſo directly tend to Man's good as *Publick Prayer*; in which we make the moſt univerſal ſolemn acknowledgments of our Obligations unto, and Dependence upon, the Supreme Lord of all the World; and by which all the Servants of God in all times, places and circumſtances, do with one heart and voice, by common conſent [b] reveal their wants, and obtain ſupplies for them. So that we may call this the *Life and Soul of Religion*, the *Anima Mundi*, that univerſal Soul which quickens, unites and moves the whole Chriſtian World. Nor is the caſe of a private man more deſperate, when he breaths no

[a] *Credendum eſt totum quo recte colitur Deus homini prodeſſe non Deo.* Aug. *Civit. Dei l.* 10. *cap.* 5.

[b] *Publica eſt nobis & Communis Oratio, & quando oramus, non pro uno, ſed pro toto populo oramus; quia totus populus unum ſumus.* Cyprian.

more in ſecret Prayer, than the condition of a Church is, where publick Devotions ceaſe. St. *Hierome* out of *Hippolytus* puts the ceſſation of *Liturgy* as a principal ſign of the coming of *Antichriſt* [c]. And nothing more clearly ſhews a profane Generation [d], the very title of wicked men in Scripture [e] being that *they call not upon God.* 'Tis well if any of us can excuſe our ſelves; but the general neglect of daily Prayers [f] by Miniſters (who are both deſirous and bound to perform them) doth too ſadly teſtifie they are tired out with the Peoples conſtant abſence, and altogether witneſſeth an Univerſal decay of true Piety. Perhaps the diſhonour, that is caſt upon God and Religion will not move theſe diſregarders, and neglecters, ſince they live ſo that a ſtranger could not imagine they had any God at all. But I hope they have yet ſo much Charity for their own Perſons, that it may ſtartle them to conſider what miſchiefs are hereby brought upon their own ſelves as well as others. Wherefore let them ask the cauſe of all that *Atheiſm* and *Profaneneſs*, *Luxury* and *Oppreſſion*, *Lying* and *Deceiving*, *Malice* and *Bitterneſs* that is broke in upon us, to the torment and diſquiet of the whole World. Let them ask why they plague others with their ſins, and others requite them again? and it will appear that all this is come upon us becauſe we forget *God* and *Heaven*, *Death* and *Judgment*, which daily Prayers would mind us of. Our Souls are fixed to the *Earth*, becauſe we liſt them not up to *Heaven.* We have neither Grace to doe good, nor reſiſt ſin, becauſe we never ask it; and we can have as little hopes of Glory as we have ſigns of Grace, becauſe we do not prepare for it. But if theſe Evils be too thin and ſpiritual, let it be enquired whence our national and perſonal Calamities proceed, Epidemical Diſeaſes, Wars and Peſtilences? Whence comes the multiplication of Hereſies, the prevalency and pride of the Enemies of the true Religion? The Jews will tell you, *Jacob*'s Voice in the Synagogue [g] keeps off *Eſau*'s Hands from the People. We have diſreſpected and ſlighted God and his Worſhip, and he may juſtly put us out of his Protection: If he meet us not in his Houſe, he may go away [h] diſpleaſed; and then we lie open to all evil when our defence is departed from us; and they that provoke him ſo to doe, are enemies to themſelves, and to the Church and State where they live, indeed the worſt of Neighbours [i]. But notwithſtanding all this; while ſober and devout Men lament this Epidemical Iniquity, and groan under

[c] Hieron. *Com. in Dan.* [d] Gen. 4. 26. Chal. Par. *Tunc profani fuerunt homines ut non orarent in nomine Domini. Edit.* Ven. [e] Pſal. xiv. 4. & liii. 4. [f] *In the Rubrick before the Morning Prayer.*

[g] *Omni tempore quo Jacobi vox eſt in Synagogis, non ſunt ibi manus Eſau.* Prov. *Rab. lib. Muſar.* [h] *Si Deus ſ. b. Synagogam intrat & nemo inventus eſt, abiit iratus, ut* Iſa. 50. 2. Buxtorf. *Syn. ex Rb.* [i] *Quiſquis incolit civitatem in qua extat Synagoga & eam tecum non adiit is eſt vicinus malus.* R. Nath. *de Latr.*

under the ſad effects thereof, paſſionately wiſhing a ſpeedy remedy; the Offenders grow bold by their numbers, and hardned by this evil cuſtome, till they now deſpiſe a reproof, and deny this Negligence to be a ſin, becauſe they have no mind to amend it. But theſe are of two kinds:

1. Thoſe that make their buſineſs their Apology, and ſuppoſe it is unreaſonable to expect them every day at *Common-Prayer*, and judge it ſufficient to ſay they cannot come.

2. Thoſe which have learned to deſpiſe or hate the Prayers of the Church, and to ſcorn that which their Fore-fathers (generally better than they) did heartily ſerve God by; who account it their Vertue to abſtain from them, and having ſufficiently undervalued theſe Devotions ſtampt by publick Authority, imagine they may ſay innocently enough, they will not come; and if to diſparage the Rule did take off our Obligation to walk by it, then theſe Scorners were the leaſt of ſinners. But neither the excuſes of the one ſhall cover his Covetouſneſs and Irreligion, nor the confidence of the other ſhelter his Pride at the laſt and dreadfull day. So that I ſuppoſe it may be a friendly office, and will be ſo accepted, to warn all ſuch of the unſafe grounds they relie upon, in their forbearing publick Prayers. And this I ſhall doe by repreſenting with all Moderation, 1. The Reaſonableneſs of our being preſent at daily Prayers, to thoſe who ſay they cannot. 2. The Excellency of the Liturgy, to thoſe who ſay they will not come. And this I am obliged to doe, to *ſmooth the way to the Temple*: For in vain do we ſhew how men may be devout there, if they excuſe or deny coming thither. And we muſt not ſo confine our Charity to theſe within the Walls, as to forget thoſe without. We love the one beſt, but we muſt pity the other alſo, and endeavour to deliver their Souls from living in a conſtant Sin, which they miſcall Innocence. I know I oppoſe a Torrent; but as long as Men have Reaſon, I ſhall hope ſuch as will conſider may either be convinced, or rendred more moderate. However this will confirm thoſe that are of the true Church, and it is ſomething with me to ſerve ſuch.

1. We ſhall demonſtrate the *reaſonableneſs* of the daily attendance on *Publick Prayers*; and that principally from the univerſal Reaſon of all the World, and the concurrent practice and conſent[k] of all Mankind, which agrees in this, that whereſoever they own a God true or falſe, they daily perform ſome Worſhip

[k] *Non etenim penitus vana eſt ſententia multi Quam celebrant.*

to him [l]. The very Heathens, beside their private Requests and Vows, made particular Addresses to their Temples [m] in all their great concerns [n] and yet abstained not from the daily Sacrifices, nor from the frequent Festivals of their numerous Deities; in *Ægypt* (as *Porphyry* relates) they praised their Gods with Hymns three or four times every day [o]. The *Turks* are called to their Houses of Prayer five times every day, and six times upon the Fridays; and he that notoriously absents himself, is punished with disgrace and hath a Fine set upon him. And if our Saviour think it reasonable we should doe something more [p], how dare we call it unreasonable, when we are not injoined to doe so much as they? But to go on, who knows not that the *Jews* had set hours of Prayers, when all devout people (even *Christ*'s *Apostles* [q]) went to the Temple or Synagogues to offer up publick Supplications? And these hours are observed among them exactly to this very day. One instance of their strictness in this Particular we learn from the *Talmud*; where it appears that because of the distance of the Temple, and the impossibility of attendance on the daily Sacrifice, those who could not come hired certain devout Men who were called [*viri stationis*] the men of appearance, to present themselves daily there, and put up Petitions for them [r]. And the Pharisees not onely observed the usual hours of Prayer, but doubled them, and zealously kept them all. Now Jesus tells us, our righteousness must exceed theirs, if ever we hope to enter into his Kingdom [s]. Which Precept of his, some of us could almost afford to call an intolerable burthen, for we call a smaller matter by a worse name. To pass then to the Christian Church. We have an express Command, to pray without ceasing [t], that is without omitting the set times which every day return, and ought to be observed.

In obedience hereunto the Church in the Apostles time, met at daily Prayers [v]; and so did the Primitive Christians for many Ages after [x], who had their *Liturgy*, *Eucharist* and *Hymns*, even in the night when persecution prevented them in the day. And surely their zeal and fervour is a huge reproach to our sloth, who yet call our selves of the same Religion, and are so far from venturing lives and estates to enjoy opportunities of Devotions; that we will not leave our shop nor our company, nay, our very idleness

[l] Micah iv. v. 5.

[m] Ἐπὶ πάσῃ ὁρμῇ, καὶ μικρῷ καὶ μεγάλῳ πράγματος θεὸν αἰεὶ πᾶν καλοῦσι. Plato in Timæo.

[n] L. Scipio *nil magnum aggressus est nisi priùs ascenso Capitolio Deus ibi veneratus esset.* Liv. *l.* 26.

[o] *L. de abstin.* 4. § 8.

[p] Matt. 5. v. 47. Τί περισσόν;

[q] Act. iii. 1.

[r] *Talm. Tract. Tabanaiot. & ap. Petrum Cunæum de R. Public. Hebræorum.*

[s] Matt. v. v. 20.

[t] 1 Thess. v. v. 17. Gr. ἀδιαλείπτως *sc. ut nullo die intermittantur certa tempora Orandi.* August.

[v] Acts ii. 46.

[x] *Injunctis precibus frequenter decenterque interdiu noctuque insistunt.* Orig. in Cels. *l.* 6.

idleneſs half an hour, for a freer and more eaſie Worſhip than they could enjoy. Surely we are as unlike them in Practice, as we are like in Name and Profeſſion. Twice a day was not enough for them, wherefore they appointed (in the days of Martyrdom) three ſet times in every day for Prayer; Nine, Twelve, and Three in the Afternoon [y], and punctually obſerved them. Afterwards, in more quiet times, it was wonderfull to behold the orderly performance of *Morning* and *Evening Prayer* [z] in huge Aſſemblies of Men and Women [a], who failed not of their conſtant attendance. Theſe are the Men and Times whoſe Principles we are reformed by, but I wiſh that corrupted Church who forced us to a Separation, do not prove more conformable to the outward part of their Practice in a due obſervance of publick Prayer, than we who have more Knowledge, better Prayers, fewer Excuſes, and yet leſs Devotion. Wherefore let us no more complain of our own Church for expecting us at daily Prayers. Let us rather challenge all Nations and People for fools, and declare it unreaſonable, that we ſhould have any God at all, or let him have any of our time, though he give us all we have. Let us tell the World, we are ſelf-ſufficient for the Conduct and Defence of our ſelves and our Affairs, and then we ſhall diſcover our ſelves what we are: We muſt not feign our ſelves too buſie; for we do lay aſide our buſineſs daily, for cauſes leſs weighty, and advantages more inconſiderable. If Vanity or Luſt, Sathan or his Emiſſaries call, we can find Leiſure; and why not when God calls? unleſs we think all that time loſt which is ſpent upon his ſervice, or as if we needed not his bleſſing. In ſhort, If unavoidable buſineſs did hinder us and nothing elſe, many men might come always, and all ſometimes, and every day an hundred for one that now comes. Wherefore it is Sloth and Covetouſneſs, or Atheiſm and Irreligion keeps us away. And if ſo, what ſignifie thoſe pretences of praying at home (which ought to be done too?) Verily no more than thoſe of the idle School-boy who ſeeks a Corner not to learn, but play in without diſturbance. And truly it is to be doubted that conſtant neglecters of Publick Prayers, uſe ſeldom and ſlight Devotions

[y] *In orationibus celebrandis invenimus obſervaſſe horam tertiam, ſextam & nonam, Sacramento ſcil. Trinitatis.* D. Cypr. *de Orat. Dom.*

Τίνες ὥρας τακτὰς ἀπονέμουσιν εὐχῇ, ὡς τρίτην φέρε καὶ ἕκτην, καὶ ἐννάτην. Clem. Alex. *Strom. l.* 7.

[z] Τοῦτο ἴσασιν οἱ μύσται πῶς καθ' ἑκάστην ἡμέραν γίνεται ἐν ἑσπέρᾳ τε καὶ πρωΐ. Chryſ. *in* 1 Tim. *cap.* 2.

[a] *Cujuſvis ætatis viri ac fœminæ, totis animi viribus hilarique mente precando & gratias agendo Deum bonorum autorem venerabantur.* Euſeb. *Eccleſ. Hiſt. l.* 10. *c.* 3.

tions in Private, for they may make the same Objections against them. Finally, Therefore do but remember the reasonableness of this is to be tried at a higher Tribunal, and come as often as God can in reason expect to meet you there, and I shall ask no more.

2. To the *reasonableness* of the Churches Injunction we may add, the *excellency* of that Provision which is made for you, which ought to invite you to come, and will be an aggravation of your neglect. But here I must not expatiate into the particular Encomium which every part of the Liturgy deserves. That would make the Porch larger than the House, and may better be seen in the following Discourse: Onely at present we may say this of it in general, that though all Churches in the World have and ever had Forms of Prayer; yet none was ever blessed with so comprehensive, so exact, and so inoffensive a Composure; Which is so *judiciously contrived* that the *wisest* may exercise at once their Knowledge and Devotion; and yet so *plain*, that the *most ignorant* may pray with Understanding: So *full*, that nothing is omitted that is fit to be asked in publick; and so *particular*, that it comprises most things which we would pray for in private; and yet so *short*, as not to tire any that have true Devotion. Its *Doctrine* is pure and Primitive; its *Ceremonies* so few and Innocent, that most of the Christian World agree in them; its *Method* is exact and natural; its *Language* is significant and perspicuous, most of the Words and Phrases being taken out of Holy Scripture, and the rest are the expressions of the first and best Ages: so that whoever takes exceptions at these must quarrel with the Language of the Holy Ghost, or fall out with the Church in her greatest Innocence. Indeed, the greatest part of these Prayers are primitive, or a second Edition of the most ancient Liturgies of the Eastern and Western Churches corrected and amended. And in the opinion of the most impartial and excellent *Grotius* [b], (who was no Member of, nor had any Obligation to this Church) the *English Liturgy* comes so near that Pattern, that none of the Reformed Churches can compare with it. And if any thing External be needfull to recommend that which is so glorious within: We may add, That the *Composers* were all men of great Piety and Learning:

[b] *Certum mihi est* Λειτουργίαν *Anglicanam, item morem imponendi manus adolescentibus in memoriam baptismi, Autoritatem Episcoporum, Presbyteria ex solis pastoribus composita, multáque alia ejusmodi satis congruere institutis vetustioris Ecclesiæ: à quibus in Gallia & Belgio recessum negare non possumus.* Grot. *Epist. ad* Boet.

ning: For they were all either *Martyrs* or *Confessors* upon the Restitution of Popery, which, as it declares their Piety, so the Judicious Digesting of these Prayers doth evidence their Learning; for therein a Scholar can discern close Logick, pleasing Rhetorick, pure Divinity, and the very Marrow of all the Ancient Doctrine and Discipline; and yet all made so familiar, that the unlearned may safely say, *Amen* [c]. Lastly, all these Excellencies have obtained that universal Reputation, which these Prayers enjoy in all the World, so that they are deservedly admired by the Eastern Churches, and had in great esteem by the most eminent Protestants [d] beyond the Seas (the most impartial Judges.) In fine, this *Liturgy* is honoured by all, but the *Romanist*, whose interest it opposeth, and some *Dissenters*, whose prejudices will not let them see its lustre; whence it is they call that (which Papists hate because it is Protestant) Superstitious and Popish, and though they count it *Roman*, condemn it without a hearing. But when we remember, the best things in a bad world have most Enemies (as it doth not lessen its worth, so) it must not abate our esteem, that it hath malitious or misguided Adversaries; who for all this hold the Conclusion, and obstinately resolve they will not come.

[c] 1 Cor. xiv. 16.

[d] *See D.* Durel *his defence of the Liturgy.*

How endless and unprofitable it is to dispute with these, the little success of the best arguments managed by the wisest Men do too sadly testifie. Wherefore I shall decline that, and attempt to convince the Enemies, by assisting the Friends of our Church-Devotions. And by drawing that veil which the ignorance and indevotion of some, and the passion and prejudice of others have cast over them, I shall represent the *Liturgy* in its true and native lustre, which is so lovely and ravishing, that, like the purest Beauties, it needs no supplement of Art and Dressing, but conquers by its own attractives, and wins the affections of all but those that do not see it clearly [e]. This will be sufficient, I am sure, to shew that whoever desires no more than to worship God with zeal and knowledge, spirit and truth, purity and sincerity, may doe it by these devout Forms; so that I should have concluded here my Preface (when I had given a more particular account of this undertaking) but that I must first examine an Objection or two, which are like a skin over the eyes of some, and, be the Picture never so full of graces, will spoil the Prospect, if they be not removed.

[e] *Ignorant qui non amant.*

Object. 1.

Object. 1. *It is ſaid to be a Form, and therefore a hindrance to zealous praying by the ſpirit.*

Anſw. Whoever makes this Objection, and affirms we cannot pray by the Spirit in the words of a Form, muſt beware his ignorance betray him not into a dangerous uncharitableneſs, and perhaps blaſphemy. For the *Saints* of the *Old Teſtament* [f] prayed by *Forms*, and ſo did *Chriſt* himſelf in the *New* [g], and he taught his Apoſtles a *Form* to pray by, and dare any ſay they prayed not by the Spirit? Have not all Churches, ſince the Apoſtles times to our days had their *Forms* of Prayer? And did not the devouteſt men of all Ages compoſe and uſe ſuch? Was ever *Extempore* Prayer heard of in Publick (till of late) unleſs on ſpecial occaſions; and do we think no Church nor no Perſons prayed by the Spirit, till now? To come nearer ſtill: Have not *France* and *Geneva* their *Forms*? And did not learned *Calvin* (and the beſt reformed Divines) uſe a *Form* before their Sermons? And is not an unſtudied Prayer a Form to the People, who are confined to pray in the Speaker's words? And will you ſay theſe all pray without the Spirit of God? But ſure we hug the Phraſe of *Praying by the Spirit*, not attending the Senſe. For the meaning doubtleſs is, to be ſo aſſiſted by the Holy Ghoſt, that (our Thoughts being compoſed, and our Souls calmed, and our Hearts deeply affected with our Wants, and the Divine All-ſufficiency) we can pray with a ſtrong Faith, and a fervent Love: When we are ſo intent upon our Requeſts that we duly weigh them, and purſue every Petition with preſſing Importunity, ardent Deſires, and vigorous Affections, this is the *Spirit of Prayer*. And thus we may better pray by the Spirit in the words of a *Form*, than we can do, when our Mind is imployed in inventing new expreſſions. For having a *Form* (which cuſtome hath made familiar) we have all things ſet down to our *Hands* which we or others want; and we are at leiſure to improve the good Motions of the Spirit; having no more to doe but to join our Souls and Affections to every Petition, and follow them up to Heaven in moſt paſſionate and zealous wiſhes that God would grant them: Whereas in *Extempore Prayer* the Petitions expire into Air in a moment, for neither Miniſter nor People knew them before, nor can remember them afterwards; the

[f] Num. vi. 25. Deut. xxvi. 3. Ezra ii. 5. Dan. ix. 1.
[g] Matt. xxvi. 44.

the one being buſie in inventing, the others in expecting a pleaſing novelty. And methinks it argues more of the Spirit of God, when we can attend the old Prayers with Zeal and Love, than when we need variety and novel Expreſſions, to skrew us up into a Devotion too much like Artifice, and ſeeming rather to be moved by the pleaſure of the Fancy, than the actings of Deſire. We may judge of the effects of God's Spirit rather by diſpoſing our Hearts to join in a well-compoſed Form, than by filling our Heads with new Prayers, or opening our Mouths in fluent Expreſſions; both which may be done without the help of the Spirit, but to be devout without it is moſt impoſſible. To which we ſhall onely add, that many truly good men, and ſound Members of our Church, do daily uſe theſe Prayers with as much Spirit and Life, with as ſerious and ſincere Devotion, as any in the World can doe. And this they account a demonſtration that the Spirit doth aſſiſt them in this Form. And ſo it may aſſiſt theſe miſtaken Perſons if they will lay down their groundleſs prejudice, and ſtrive to ſerve God thus as well as they can. So would the good Spirit aſſiſt their Prayers, and make up our differences [b], giving us one Mind and one Spirit, that with one Heart and one Mouth we might glorifie one God.

[b] *Quis enim inimicum adhuc ducere poteſt eum cum quo unam ad Deum vocem emiſit.* D. Baſil.

Object. 2. But it is farther urged, *That theſe Prayers, though good in themſelves, will grow flat and nauſeous by daily uſe* [i], *and conſequently become an impediment to Devotion.*

[i] *Vilia ſunt nobis quæcunque prioribus annis Vidimus, & ſordet quicquid ſpectavimus olim.* Calphurn. *Ecl.* 3.

Anſw. We come not to the Houſe of God for Recreation, but for a ſupply of our wants; and therefore this might be a better reaſon of an empty Theatre, than a thin Congregation. We come to God in Publick, to petition for the relief of our own general Neceſſities, and thoſe of the whole Church, *viz.* for Pardon of Sin, Peace of Conſcience and Succours of Divine Grace, and a Deliverance from Sin and Sathan, Death and Hell: as alſo for Food and Raiment, Health and Strength, Protection and Succeſs in all our concerns; and more generally for the Peace of the Kingdom, the Proſperity of the Church, the Propagation of the Goſpel, and the Succeſs of its Miniſters. Now theſe things are always needfull, and always the ſame, to be prayed for every day alike. Wherefore (unleſs we be ſo

vain as to fanſie God is delighted with *Variety* and *Change* as well as we? what need is there to alter the Phraſe every day, or what efficacy can a new model give to our old Requeſts? Particular wants and ſingle Caſes muſt be ſupplied by the Cloſet-devotions; for the Publick, whether by *Form* or *Extempore*, can never reach all thoſe which are ſo numerous and variable. Wherefore one Form may fit all that ought to be asked in the Church; and why then ſhould we deſire a needleſs and infinite Variety and Alteration? If we do, it is out of Curioſity, not Neceſſity. The poor man is moſt healthfull whoſe Labour procures him both Appetite and Digeſtion, who ſeldom changeth his Diſh, yet finds a Reliſh in it, and a new Strength from it every day: And ſo it is with the ſober and induſtrious Chriſtian, who, buſying himſelf in ſerving God, gets daily a new ſenſe of his Wants, and conſequently a freſh Stomach to theſe Holy Forms, which are never flat or dull to him, that brings new Affections to them every day. It is the *Epicure* and luxurious, the crammed lazy *Wanton*, or the diſeaſed Man that need *quelques choſes*, or *Sauces*, to make this daily bread deſirable. And if this be our Temper, it is a ſign of a diſeaſed Soul, and an effect of our ſurfeiting on Holy Things. In this we reſemble thoſe *Murmurers* (*Numb.* xi. 6.) who deſpiſed the *bread of Heaven* becauſe they had it *daily*, and loathed *Manna* it ſelf, calling it in ſcorn *dry Meat*. This was ſufficient to ſuſtain their Bodies, and ſatisfie their Hunger, but they required *Meat for their* Soul [k], that is, to feed their *Fancies* and their *Luſts*; even as we do, for whom the Church hath provided Prayers ſufficient to expreſs our needs, but not to ſatiate our wanton Fancies, nor gratifie the Luſt of our Curioſity; and we complain they are inſipid; ſo perhaps they are to ſuch, for the *Manna* had no taſte to the *wicked*; but it ſuited it ſelf to the Appetite and Taſte of every *good* Man, as the Jews tell us in their Traditions [l]. Sure I am, it is true here; For if we be curious and proud, or carnal and profane, there is no guſt in the *Common-Prayers*; but a truly pious Man can every day here exerciſe Repentance and Faith, Love and Deſire, and ſo uſe them as to obtain freſh Hopes of Mercy, Peace of Conſcience, Increaſe of Grace, and Expectations of Glory, and whoever finds not this, the fault is not in the Prayers, but in the indiſpoſition of his own Heart.

[k] Pſal. lxxviii. 18. LXX. Βρῶμα τῇ ψυχῇ αὐτῶν.

[l] Wiſed. xi. 21. & Fagius *on* Num. 11.

If

If all this will undeceive any, and take away their prejudice, ſo that they may *ſee* clearly what they cannot but *love*, if they did behold; I ſhall think my pains well beſtowed: If not, it appears they are reſolved to believe as they do, and I am reſolved alſo not to imitate them ſo far, as to abuſe my Adverſaries [m] with ſtrenuous revilings; becauſe it is more pleaſant to me to give a true and lovely Character of my own Devotions, than an odious, though deſerved one, of others. Onely let thoſe that delight in making Objections againſt *Forms* know, that we can eaſily recriminate, and charge *Extempore* Prayers with *Novelty*, *Confuſion*, *Irreverence*, *Vain-glory*, which can ſcarce be *denied*, and many other *Inconveniences*, that will hardly be *excuſed*. But this were to perpetuate a Quarrel; and had not been mentioned here, but to teach thoſe to be modeſt in their Cenſures [n] who are not free from all Exceptions; nay, liable to infinitely more than can be juſtly charged upon us.

[m] *Non inceſſimus adverſarios convitiis & contumeliis, ſicut plerique faciunt, rationum & argumentorum infirmitatem maledictis obtegentes.* Greg. Naz.

[n] *Cum tua prævideas oculis mala lippis inunctis, Cur in amicorum vitiis tam cernis acutum?*

But having thus cleared the way to all indifferent and diſintereſted Perſons, it is time to ſpeak briefly of the Deſign of the following *Diſcourſe*; which is to make it evident that our Excellent Prayers do deſerve all poſſible Love and Eſteem, and contain in them a rich Treaſury of all that can make our Devotion lively and uſefull. And if we be aſſiſted by God's Spirit, and come deſirous to pray with Zeal and Sincerity, here is (without calling in any aid but that of *Heaven*) a curious *Order*, clear *Method*, ſignificant *Phraſes*, and ſtrong *Arguments* to quicken our Affections, and enlarge our Souls in holy and fervent Wiſhes, Deſires and Meditations, which is the Prayer of the Inward Man, the Life and Soul of this Duty. All which we teach men to doe by giving a natural and facil *Analyſis* of the Method, and by making plain and practical *Obſervations* on the Parts, together with a literal *Paraphraſe* of the Whole. By which none can imagine I ſhould give a borrowed luſtre to the Prayers, which they had not of their own: For I onely prove they had it before, and I find all in them, that I obſerve from them; which I hope will be ſo plain, that all men will ſee the inference, and be able in their own Devotions to find out much more. Now in this *Eſſay* I ſhall hope to ſerve three ſorts of Perſons.

1. The *Ignorant*, who may be inſtructed hereby to *pray with underſtanding*. Not that we ſuppoſe theſe Offices ſo obſcure as to need a Comment (for nothing can be more plainly expreſſed, nor is it poſſible to invent words more univerſally underſtood) but many that underſtand the *Senſe* of the Words, have not Art enough to diſcern the *Order*, *Method* and *Connexion* of the Prayers, nor skill to find out the *Arguments* that preſs every Requeſt; or the places of Scripture which furniſh theſe Devotions with ſignificant Phraſes, nor Judgment to deſcribe what diſpoſition of Soul doth ſuit the ſeveral parts of them. And if we conſider, that the greateſt number are ſuch, we ſhall think it ſeaſonable to help them with a plain and eaſie *Explication*. Beſides, there are many (in other things) knowing Perſons, who, rather for want of Conſideration than Judgment, never took notice of the natural dependences of theſe Prayers, nor the true and full import of the Expreſſions, nor of the Graces to be exerciſed in the ſeveral Parts, becauſe they onely attended the words, but took no care to expatiate into holy Meditations. And if the former need a *Maſter*, theſe want a *Monitor*, leſt they offend in a worſe kind °: For Negligence is worſe than ſimple Ignorance. But, I hope, though all that is here be obvious, yet ſomething will be found which either was not known or not obſerved before, and thoſe things alſo ſuch as may elevate the Affections, and make the Prayers more pleaſing and more profitable.

° *Non tibi deputatur ad culpam quod invitus ignoras; ſed quod negligis quærere quod ignoras.* Aug. de lib. Arbitr. l. 3. c. 19.

2. The *Devout Servants of God*, and *Obedient Sons of the Church*, whoſe care it is to pray daily in the Publick, and whoſe Deſire and Endeavour is to doe it well. Might I be a *Nethenim* to hew wood and prepare fuel for the Altars of their Hearts, I ſhould rejoice; and it hath been my Care to ſuggeſt not always the moſt Critical, but the moſt Practical Senſe, which moſt directly tended to help Devotion, for theſe Mens ſake; who no doubt have in their own Hearts made many of theſe Obſervations before, and I hope they will like them no worſe, for I ſhall like them better, in hopes the ſame Spirit directed me and them. But I hope that what I have done will (beſides its preſent aſſiſtence) ſuggeſt a way to all devout Souls for making pathetical and pious Enlargements, more and better than are to be found here; that ſo our daily Offices may be full of Life and Pleaſure; and every day court us with new Delights. And I muſt affirm, I have rather opened the top than ſearched the bottom of this rich

rich Mine. But ſure I am we had need to quicken our Devotion all we can, not onely for our own good, but that our flames might thaw the hearts and lighten the eyes of the reſt of the Congregation; which ſcarce ever mind either Words or Senſe, but are either ſleepy or tired, to the diſhonour of *God*, the diſcomfort of the *Miniſter* [p] and the ruine of their *own* Souls. How happy ſhould we be, if by my Endeavours and your Examples, we awaken ſuch into a Senſe of their Duty; that theſe excellent Prayers might every where be ſaid with an excellent Spirit, for the benefit of particulars, and the good of the whole Church?

[p] *Pauci mecum ſunt in oratione, & hi ipſi vertiginoſi, hiantes, aſſiduè ſe convertentes & obſervantes, quando Pſalmorum cantor verſus finiet; quando ab Eccleſiâ, velut à carcere ab orationis neceſſitate liberabuntur.* Baſil. Conc. 1. *de ſeru.*

3. The *miſtaken Diſſenters*: Who hereby may be convinced (and perhaps perſuaded) [q] that we can pray by this Form with as much *Zeal* and more *Knowledge*, with as much *Spirit* and more *Truth*, than by any other kind of Prayer. And then it muſt appear, that this *Venerable Liturgy* hath been falſly repreſented by ſuch, who would not have it ſeen truly, leſt it ſhould be loved really [r]. But if they are ſo much their own Maſters, as that they dare to reade the Prayers ſeriouſly, and view this little Book with as much *Charity* as it was written with, I ſhall hope either for their *Company* at Prayers, or at leaſt to eſcape their *Cenſures* for going thither. For unleſs they be fooliſhly obſtinate they muſt either love them, or cannot hate them. If they would love them, and pray with us, we ſhall be *friends*; and if onely the ſecond be obtained, we ſhall be *quiet*, and even that is deſirable. That theſe are the deſigns which began and encouraged this Undertaking, the *Authours* own Conſcience doth teſtifie; and he hopes even thoſe who approve not the Means, muſt confeſs the End of this *Work* is good. And if it be ſucceſsfull in any of theſe kinds, he will not repent his pains. If in none, he is not the firſt that hath failed of accompliſhing good intentions. However he will have ſatisfaction in the Peace of a *good Conſcience* [s] and may ſay with that noble *Roman* [t], *If the Succeſs anſwers his Sincerity, it muſt be a cauſe of univerſal Joy; if not, he can rejoyce in his cordial Intentions to doe.*

[q] *Facilius vinci poſſunt quam perſuaderi.* Hieron.

[r] *Credunt de nobis quæ non probantur, nolunt inquiri ne probentur; non eſſe.* Tert.

Ante nos inciptunt homines odiſſe quam noſſe, ne cognitos aut imitari poſſint aut damnari non poſſint. Cyprian. *de Idol. Van.*

[s] 2 Cor. i. 12.

[t] *Si ſequuta fuerit quæ debuit fortuna, nos omnes gaudebimus; ſin minùs, ego tamen gaudebo.* Brutus ap. Ciceronem.

to doe good. For the Cenſures of furious *Zealots*, or the Scoffing of profane *Libertins*, he doth not value them, being onely unwilling to offend Authority or true Piety. Wherefore he doth humbly ſubmit theſe Pages to the Judicious Correction of the *Reverend Fathers of the Church*, deſiring nothing may be ſaid which diſſents from the Doctrine and Diſcipline now eſtabliſhed; for if it do, it is without the *Authours* Knowledge and againſt his Judgment. And now 'tis time to conclude this *Preface* with a two-fold Requeſt.

First, To my Brethren of the *Clergy*, that they will reade theſe Prayers ſo *frequently*, that ſuch as have leiſure may never want opportunity thus to ſerve God; and ſo *fervently*, that thoſe who do attend them, may be brought into an high eſteem of them. It was a great end of God's inſtituting the Prieſt's Office, and a principal motive to our pious Anceſtours in their liberal Proviſions for it [y]; That there might be an Order of Men on purpoſe to *Pray daily* for all Mankind, eſpecially for ſuch as could not daily attend *Divine Service:* So that if we neglect this *daily Sacrifice*, we neither anſwer the Deſigns of God, nor of our Benefactours: And as we are not excuſed by, ſo we ought not to be diſcouraged at the Peoples ſlowneſs in coming to *daily Prayers*, for their Preſence is indeed a Comfort to us, and an Advantage to themſelves, but their Abſence doth not hinder the Succeſs, nor ſhould it obſtruct the Performance of our *Prayers*. The Promiſe of *Jeſus* is made to *two or three*; and ſince our Petitions are directed to God, we need not regard who is abſent, ſo long as he is preſent to whom we ſpeak: For he accepts our Requeſts, not by the *Number*, but the *Sincerity* of thoſe that make them: Let our Congregation therefore be great or ſmall, it is our Duty to reade theſe Prayers daily: And every day to doe it with ſuch *Fervency* and *Reverence*, as may declare that our Affections keep pace with our Words, while we are preſenting ſo excellent Requeſts to ſo infinite a Majeſty, upon ſo weighty Occaſions: And alſo we muſt recite them with ſuch *Gravity* and *Deliberation*, as may afford ſufficient time both for our ſelves and our People to conſider every Petition, and preſs it with devout Affections, and a holy Importunity, which is the *Life of Prayer* [z]: and if any uſe theſe comprehenſive Forms without ſuch pious enlargements, it is not for want of matter in the Offices (as I have demon-

[y] *Canones R. Edgar I. & XLV. ad* Spelman. *Concil. An. Chr.* 967. *& alibi ſæpiſſime.*

[z] *Cum Oratio Deum, hoc verſetur in corde, quod profertur in ore.* Aug. *Fungamur verbis ſenſum: ſenſui affectum.* D. Bern. *in Cantic. Serm.* 23.

demonſtrated) but for want of Devotion and Zeal in their own Hearts. 'Tis onely ſuch as have no true ſenſe of Piety who ſay the *Liturgy* without Affection; and I am very confident the rude and haſty repeating thereof hath contributed more to the making *Common-Prayer* odious and contemptible, than the Arguments or the Aſperſions of its moſt malitious Enemies; whereas if we our ſelves would ſhew that we are ſincerely affected and concerned while we pray by it, we may expect it will be acceptable to God, and of high eſteem among all People; ſo that I wiſh it may not be ſaid of any of us, as once of *Eli*'s Sons, *Their ſin was very great, for they made men abhor the offering of the Lord*, 1 Sam. xi. 17.

Secondly, I ſhall make it my earneſt Requeſt to all the *People* of this Church, not to judge of theſe Prayers by the Character that *Ignorance* and *Atheiſm*, *Prejudice* and *evil Intereſts* faſten on them; but to conſider them very well, and then they will find the *Liturgy* to be plainer and more methodical in it ſelf, more comprehenſive and more ſutable to a publick Congregation, than the beſt *Extemporè* Effuſion, which makes more noiſe and ſhew, but is emptier, and of far leſs weight in the eſteem of *God* and all *Judicious Men*. Let none therefore think it a needleſs and unprofitable waſte of time to go to the Houſe of God onely to hear *Common-Prayer*; for Prayer is the proper Duty of that place, which is called *the Houſe of Prayer*; and it is a Duty that is of all others the higheſt and hardeſt, and yet the moſt profitable, if it be devoutly and well performed. So that I cannot but pity and lament the *Stupidity* of thoſe, who either ſleep, or ſit by heedleſs and unconcerned, while ſo great and ſo advantageous a Scene of Duty lies before them. And I muſt (for their own ſakes) beſeech all that are preſent at theſe Devotions; *Firſt*, to compoſe their Bodies into thoſe moſt reverent Poſtures which the Church hath ſuited to every part of Duty, *Kneeling* at the *Confeſſion*, *Abſolution* and *Prayers*; *Standing* at the *Gloria Patri*, *Hymns* and *Creeds*, and *Bowing* at the Holy *Name of Jeſus*; for a general uniformity in theſe things doth declare, that there is in us a due ſenſe of the Divine Preſence, a great obedience to our Governours, and a ſweet harmony between our Bodies and Souls in the Worſhip we pay to the Creatour of both. *Secondly*, To make their Reſponſes with a loud and audible voice. The *Romaniſt* cannot bear a part in his adored *Maſs*, becauſe it is in an

an *unknown Tongue*; the *Separatist* is excluded from all share in this Duty by the *novel* Device of one *tedious Form* without variety or intermission; but the *Church* of *England* not onely allows this primitive Privilege to her Sons, but commands it; and surely none will forbear to answer out of Lazinesse, that consider the Honour and Benefit thereof; nor ought any to be silent out of modesty or shame, it being no shame that men should hear us Pray in *the House of Prayer*, for we came on purpose to Pray, and the onely shame is, to be mute and silent. *Thirdly*, Let me intreat them to Ponder the Divine All-sufficiency, and their own great Necessities, before they begin; and to keep their Heart close to every Petition as they go along, and they will find them all so fit to be asked, and so likely to be obtained; so agreeable to their own wants, and to the necessities of all Mankind; that it will be pleasant to ask them, and delightfull to expect a gratious answer to them. And if they daily come, and constantly use the *Common-Prayer* in this manner, they will neither be tired with the Length, nor wearied with the frequent Repetition thereof; for it will appear to be the most noble and comfortable exercise that Religion doth afford; it will increase their Graces, multiply their Blessings, and fit them for the never-ceasing Service of the *Heavenly Choir*. *May the God of Peace therefore reconcile us to these Prayers, and to one another, giving us pious and zealous* Priests, *devout and well-disposed* People, *that we may have full* Churches, *frequent* Prayers, *and fervent* Charity; *than which nothing will more conduce to the publick Happiness of this Nation, and the Salvation of all our Souls; the good Lord grant it therefore, for Jesus sake.* Amen.

FINIS.

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